

3.4 Summary of Regional Planning Officials Breakout Session

***Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan
July 31 – August 1, 2000
New Orleans Marriott***

This document summarizes the items discussed during the Regional Planning Officials Breakout Session held on July 31 and August 1, 2000. This Breakout Session, which was one of the six sessions held for the various transportation modes, served as an important component of the first *Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan* held at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel.

The primary purpose of this Breakout Session was to 1) review and validate the highway and intermodal elements included in the 1996 *Louisiana Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan (SITP)* and related benchmarks included in *Louisiana: Vision 2020*, and 2) identify new or additional strategic issues for consideration in the Plan Update. The related *SITP* and *Vision 2020* items are attached.

Approximately 60 persons attended the Breakout Session, which included representatives of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Cities, LDOTD, FHWA, Highway Corridor Commissions and other public and private sector stakeholders.

Participants clearly confirmed their support for inclusion of the related 1996 *SITP* elements in the Plan Update, with suggested updates and modifications. This Breakout Session addressed all three highway-related elements and thirteen of the intermodal-related elements contained in the 1996 *SITP*, as well as several infrastructure benchmarks included in *Vision 2020*. No changes were suggested for the *SITP* intermodal elements or the *Vision 2020* benchmarks. Important items discussed for the three highway elements are summarized below.

H-1 Expansion of Freeway System

This element includes a total of 17 freeway improvement projects, consisting of widening of existing facilities and new freeways.

- The federal/state costs should be updated for all projects. (For example, it was indicated that a more accurate cost for H-1A Northern Extension of I-49 is \$350-400 million).
- The reference to “five” lanes indicated for H-1G Widen I-10 in Baton Rouge should be deleted in the description or updated to reflect the actual number of lanes being recommended in the ongoing I-10 MIS/DEIS.

- Consideration should be given to moving several of the freeway projects to higher tiers due to their increased importance and higher need since the 1996 SITP. Examples included H-1A Northern Extension of I-49, H-1B Southern Extension of I-49 (Lafayette Urban Area and I-310- to Westbank in New Orleans), H-1G Widening of I-10 in Baton Rouge, and H-1R Widening of I-10 in New Orleans. It was also suggested that some or all of the freeway expansion projects not being included in the 1996 SITP due to financial constraints be included in the Plan Update. DOTD has recently begun the EIS process on some of these, such as I-49 South between Lafayette and Morgan City, which indicates that a re-ordering of the priorities of individual components of the State's freeway plan may be warranted.
- Recognize importance of hurricane evacuation in the development and prioritization of freeway expansion improvements (i.e., H-1E Houma - Thibodaux to I-10 connection).
- Add the proposed I-69 corridor.
- Dr. Eric Kalivoda, LDOTD, advised participants that proponents of additional freeway or other major transportation improvements will be required to present their project and related justification to the appropriate Advisory Council to be considered for inclusion in the Plan Update.

H-2 Develop Variable Message Signage on Causeways

This element includes the development of a signage plan and installation of variable message signs along I-10 over the Atchafalaya and Bonnet Carre Floodways, as well as the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway in New Orleans. These signs would be used to advise motorists of inclement weather or closures due to accidents or construction/maintenance activities.

- Variable message signs are currently planned on I-49 and I-20 in Shreveport and should be added to the list.
- Existing and future variable message signs along the entire limits of I-10 within Louisiana should be interconnected.
- This element should incorporate the results of the ongoing Statewide ITS Plan.

H-3 Identify State Highways of Significance (SHS)

This element called for the identification of a core network of state highways to compliment the National Highway System (NHS). This system, which consists of important state highways not included in the interstate/freeway system or NHS, could

receive a higher funding priority than other routes maintained by LDOTD. The identification of the SHS was based primarily on functional classification and generally included urban and rural principal arterials, rural minor arterials, and rural major collectors.

- This item generated significant discussion and concern regarding the methodology that was used to include highways in the SHS. LDOTD indicated that they will be sending the MPOs the preliminary list of SHS routes for their review and comment and that this system would also be evaluated in the Plan Update.

Other Important Items Discussed

Three major items of discussion included: 1) preservation of existing transportation system; 2) importance of developing and utilizing quantitative criteria/methodology for evaluating the impacts and need for highway and other transportation improvements; and 3) need to focus on alternative and additional financing/funding sources required to implement needed transportation improvements within the 30-year horizon period.

Corridor preservation should be given a high priority in the Plan update. This should include the dedication of increased funds required for the adequate maintenance and improved efficiency of the existing highway system.

The evaluation criteria/methodology established for the Plan Update should recognize the differences in urban versus rural characteristics and needs, include intermodal related criteria, and recognize the interrelationships of projects (i.e. do not evaluate projects individually). It was also indicated that the Plan Update will include development of a Statewide Travel Demand Model, which will serve as a useful tool in identifying and evaluating highway improvement needs and associated impacts.

It was recommended that the Plan Update include a comprehensive analysis of alternative financing/funding scenarios and consider the following as potential investment strategies:

- Increase vehicle/truck registration fees;
- Overweight truck fees;
- Establish local option gas tax (requires legislative action);
- Develop toll facilities (state enabling legislation is in place for the establishment of local toll authorities);
- Establish state infrastructure bank;

- Establish traffic impact fees;
- Restructure/increase fuel tax;
- Provide sufficient funds to adequately preserve existing highway system and local transit facilities;
- Review fee structure of ROW use for fiber optics and other utilities; and
- Establish Finance Advisory Council for addressing this critical issue in Plan Update.

New Plan Elements

The following elements were not addressed in 1996 SITP and identified as important items that should be addressed in the Plan Update:

- Develop Statewide Access Management Plan – related to preservation and maximizing operational efficiency and safety of existing transportation system.
- Develop model ordinance and state law prohibiting incompatible land uses along freeways and principal arterials.
- Establish state policy requiring traffic impact analyses and mitigation measures for major developments.
- Address issues and develop policies related to the relationship and implications of land use on the transportation system (sustainable/smart growth, urban sprawl, etc.).
- Improve development, accuracy and updating of cost estimates for transportation improvements (refine cost estimates as improvements advance in project development, develop database of recent average unit costs on state construction projects and include in LDOTD website, etc.)